

# SIKH THEORY OF EVOLUTION: HAUMEIN AND PROBLEM OF HERMENEUTICS

Daljeet Singh

## I

### THEORY OF EVOLUTION

The Sikh theory of evolution is a distinct and unique contribution of Guru Nanak to the religious thought of man. In this paper we shall attempt to outline the Guru's theory of evolution from a *man-mukh* (ego-conscious) to a *gurmukh* (God-conscious), and how it is necessary to interpret the revelation or spiritual experience of the Gurus, in relation to their lives, or historical role which is a product of their revelation; and why persons drawn from pacifist or dichotomous religions, have difficulty in understanding the system of the Gurus.

Spiritual Experience of the Gurus: Every prophet builds the structure of his religious system on the foundations of his spiritual experience of the Basic Reality or God. It is these perceptions of the prophet, that govern his understanding of the world and approach to it. Guru Nanak's spiritual experience highlights four facts about the Basic Reality. First, He is the Creator, and is both transcendent and immanent, but He does not incarnate. Second, He is the Fount of all values. Third, He, being Love, is interested in the evolution and progress of the world, and is its Guide and Enlightener. Fourth, in view of the first three qualities of God, the goal of the spiritual man is to be the instrument of such a God or Reality.

Individuation, Ego and Man: This being the perception, the Gurus envisage a clear evolutionary growth in the organic constitution or consciousness of man. The Gurus say that "The world came into being by individuation." Evidently, for the growth of life, creation of an individual self or *haumein* (I-am-ness) or ego in every being was essential. For, there could be no animal life without there being in each unit a centre of consciousness or autonomy, which could be both the guardian and guide of the individual being. It is this centre

of individuation, that has enabled the evolution of life from the smallest being to the extremely complicated biological structure of man. The Gurus describe the evolution thus: "For several births (you) were a worm- for several births an insect; for several births a fish and an antelope" "After passing through myriads of species one is blessed with the human form." "After ages you have the glory of becoming a man. These statements of the Gurus make it clear how from the smallest speck of life, man has evolved after millions of years and myriads of births. Second, although man is mainly an animal, he is distinctly superior to other animals. His superiority lies in his two attributes which the other animals do not possess. First is his sense of discrimination, i.e., his awareness of his own thinking process and his capacity to deliberate over his thinking. The Guru makes a dear statement that man has, apart from his other potentialities, a superior sense of discrimination. "God created you out of a drop of water, and breathed life into you. He endowed you with the light of reason, sense of discrimination and wisdom." This clearly emphasises that man has the sense of making judgement and choice, i.e., a moral sense to distinguish right from wrong. For, this light of discrimination is an additional weapon with man to cope with the problems of life. The Gurus' perception is basically different from the view of modern psychology, which believes that man is virtually a determined being, and that his development and evolution are governed by the environment, following a struggle for existence and survival of the fittest. The Gurus differ completely. For, they emphasise that man should use his sense of discrimination or his freedom to choose in making a correct decision. This freedom forms the base of his moral life, which is beyond the ken of an animal. They, thus, completely repudiate the view that Moral life is just a 'defence mechanism', or a 'reaction formation' for survival to battle against the impacts of environment. The Gurus convey unambiguously that a social or a civilized life is not possible, unless man develops his internal discipline or moral life, which alone can make for progress of man in social life, or in a multi-national society.

The second superior attribute of man is that, although he is at present at the egoistic state of development, he has also the capacity

to develop a link with the Universal Consciousness, the Basic Reality or God. True, presently man is at the *manmukh* (egoistic) state of consciousness, but he has the capacity to be linked with the Universal Consciousness, or to be a *gurmukh* who works in line with the Fundamental Reality, by being its instrument. The Gurus say, "You have obtained the privilege of human birth; now is your opportunity to meet God." <sup>6</sup> "O man, you are superior in God's creation; now is your opportunity; you may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny." The Gurus stress that not only is there hope for man and an opportunity open to him, but it is also his destiny to rise above his egoistic condition, so as to become a Superman or a *gurmukh*. And it is this spiritual progress of man, which Benevolent God is helping with His Grace.

The Malady of *Haumein*: The Gurus repeatedly state that at the *manmukh* stage, man's greatest malady that blocks his progress, is his egoism or *Haumein* consciousness. The struggle against the elements and environment having largely been won, man finds himself incapable of dealing with his own species. All his rational capacities and talents are still the equipment of the egoistic man, and for that matter, are governed by his ego-consciousness. His intellectual capacities being subservient to his ego-consciousness, cannot be used for the benefit of another person. Just as a man's lungs cannot breathe for the benefit of another human being, in the same way, his rational capacities cannot help being selfish, since they are directed by his ego-consciousness. It is this organic condition of the present-day man, that holds out little hope for his ever being able rationally to rectify his disability to solve the problems of conflict, clash and war, at the individual, social or international level. It is true that during the period of man's civilised life, certain cultural conditioning for moral ends, has taken place, but the change is very superficial. The moment there is anything threatening man's personal entity or interests, his basic self-centeredness is unmasked and works with unabashed vehemence and violence. This is the spectacle we witness everyday in dealings between man and man, one society and another, and one nation and another. And this, despite all pretensions to the contrary. The Twentieth century has witnessed the worst massacres, butchery, holocausts and wars in the civilised history of man. Not only

have there been large-scale killings, but we have had the worst rulers who have not refrained from killing millions of their own innocent citizens. It is a fact that our Einsteins, Oppenhauers, and Sakharovs have been just the instruments of the tyrants who have staged those crimes, and destroyed Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The fact remains that greater the instruments of violence science has supplied to our rulers, the greater has been the threat to the security of the people and the environment of the planet. For, the ape in man, or his egoist consciousness, continues to drive the vehicles of violence, that science has placed at his disposal. And he knows of no other use of it, except to cater to his egoism and pride. Hence, the warning the learned authors of the Limits of Growth gave to the present day man: "The outcome can only be disastrous, whether due to selfishness of individual countries that continue to act purely in their own interest, or to a power struggle between the developing and the developed nations. The world system is simply not ample enough, nor generous enough, to accomodate much longer such egocentric and conflicting behaviour of its inhabitants."<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, despite about a quarter of a century having elapsed, since this warning was given, neither human behaviour, nor the behaviour of nations, has changed materially, to curb the drive towards destruction. In fact, the gap between the rich and the poor nations has been widening.

Schweitzer who made a survey of the entire field of Greek and Western thought and philosophy, came to the dismal conclusion that there is no trace of the ethical in the working of the world, or any sound basis for ethics in the present-day thought of man. He could discover nothing of purposive evolution in the material world or our thinking, by which our activities could acquire a meaning. Nor is the ethical to be found in any form in the world process. We can only describe more and more minutely the phenomena of the world. But' neither science nor thought has been able to find any meaning, purpose or direction in the world process, except a drive towards death and meaninglessness' Schumacker also sounds the same plaintive note saying that nothing is more in disarray than the ethical thought of man. Consequently, both the working of man in the present century and his present day thought do not hold out any hope for mankind.

The Gurus' Solution and the Theory of Spiritual Evolution: It is in the above context, that the Gurus not only hold out hope of progress for man, but also lay down the path of human evolution. That path is through a moral life. This is so for two reasons. First, God alone is the Source of all morality. This is, for the Gurus, not a mere assumption, but a truth which they have intuitively or mystically perceived. We find that in the processes of the world and its thought and science there is no trace of the ethical. As against it, the Gurus emphasise that the Basic Reality is not only ethical and the Ocean of Values, but is working the world towards a life of morality, harmony and love. They repeatedly stress their spiritual experience about the Fatherhood of God, the consequent brotherhood of man and the direction of the Universal Consciousness to create and evolve the Superman or *the gurmukh*, who, being linked to the Universal Consciousness, will work according to its direction. The Gurus, thus, explain that there is no midway between ego-consciousness and *Naam* or God-consciousness. They state, "There is conflict between *Naam* and *Haumein*; the two cannot be at one place." This progress from *manmukh* to *gurmukh*, or ego-consciousness to God-consciousness or Universal Consciousness, is the spiritual thesis of the Gurus, laid down in the Guru Granth Sahib, and lived and demonstrated by them, for a period of about 240 years. This thesis of evolution, the role prescribed for the Superman, and the methodology of progress, have been clearly stated by the Gurus. They say, "God created first Himself, then *Haumein* (sense of individuation), third *maya* (multi-farious beings and entities), and at the fourth place, *gurmukh* who always lives truthfully." This hymn clearly conveys the Sikh theory of evolution, and meaning and hope for man. The second part of the thesis is the role of the superman. Guru Nanak, while indicating the uselessness of some ascetic disciplines, clearly concludes that to be a *sachiara* or a superman, one has to work according to the Will of God, which he calls Altruistic. In their *bani* the Gurus profusely indicate the innumerable attributes of God, including help and shelter to the weak, and destruction of the evil. The Guru says, "Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord. He is all Love, rest He is ineffable." It is in this light that Guru Nanak says, "If you want to play the game of love, come with your head on your palm, and waver not." It means that life is a game of love; God being All Love, He is working the

world with His Altruistic Will. That is also why Guru Nanak emphasises. "Truth is higher than everything; higher still is truthful living." Further, the Guru says, "*Love*, contentment, truth, humility and other virtues enable the seed of *Naam* to sprout."<sup>16</sup> "With self-control and discipline, we forsake vice, and see the miracle of man becoming God." "Good, righteousness, virtues and the giving up of vice, are the ways to realise the essence of God." "God created the world of life and planted *Naam* therein, making it the place for righteous activity."

The quotations above and the thesis of the Gurus, lay stress on four points. First, that moral conditioning apart, at the present stage of man, he is imperfect, being only ego-conscious, which is his greatest limitation, and is also the cause of his conflict, wars, poverty and other problems. Second, that although, like the animals, his working is largely determined by the processes of cause and effect, he has, unlike other animals, the capacity to gain freedom of functioning through a moral life. Third, and this is their fundamental spiritual experience, that the Basic Reality is not only loving and altruistic, but is also the only source of altruism. Fourth, accordingly, man can be free, creative and altruistic, only through a moral life, which alone, through His Grace, can link him to the Universal Consciousness, and, for that matter, bring him peace, blissfulness, and harmony with his environment: physical, social and political.

Here we should like to explain one point. It is not suggested that the Gurus do not stress the value of meditation, remembrance or *simran* of God. But these, they do not indicate as an end in themselves. These are important means to enable man to pursue the goal of working according to the Altruistic Will of God. This point stands stressed both in their *bani* and their lives over a period of about two and a half centuries. The Guru says, "It is by our deeds that we are judged in His court." "It is by our deeds that we become near or away from God."<sup>21</sup> "Truth and continence are true deeds, not fasting and rituals."<sup>22</sup> "True living is living God in life."<sup>23</sup> "Through virtue is one enlightened."<sup>24</sup> "Imbued with His Will, he (*gurmukh*) carries it out."<sup>25</sup> "Wonderful is His Will. If one walks in His Will, then one knows how to lead the life of Truth."<sup>26</sup> "They who know His Will, carry it out." The above quotations, the hymn of evolution of

*gurmukh*, and the lives of the Ten Gurus, unambiguously emphasise that, since God is immanent in the world, and is working it, the only spiritual path is to be the instrument of His Will. And, that is why the Gurus say, that they are His soldiers or wrestlers. Thus, both the *gurmukh* and the seeker have to "live truthfully." This is the Gurus' system of spiritual evolution, as embodied in Guru Granth Sahib, and as lived by the Ten Masters.

Religious Implications of the Guru's System: The most fundamental implication of the Gurus' spiritual system is an inalienable combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. They have stressed that there can be no spiritual progress of man, unless spirituality is expressed in life and deeds. This is essential, because God Himself is informing and working the world, and the spiritual man can neither remain indifferent to, nor step aside from, the mainstream of life. Its necessary implication is that there can be no progress in empirical life, unless it is linked to the Spiritual Base, which is the source of all values and morality. This is the fundamental or the singular base of the Gurus' religious system. This also explains all the departures in principles and doctrines the Gurus made from those of thousand-of-years old systems and traditions that had been in vogue in their times. Dichotomy between the empirical and the religious life with emphasis on personal salvation, has been the basis of all the Indian systems like Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, Vedanta, etc. The logical implications of these religions were the institutions of asceticism, monasticism, *Sanyasa*, celibacy, downgrading of women, and *Ahimsa*. In the Hindu system caste divisions in the social life, had the religious sanction, but it was a discriminatory system, far from being just, fair or moral. Spiritual and empirical progress having been declared inter-linked and inter-dependent, the other corollaries of the Gurus' system follow so logically. First is the rejection of ascetism, monasticism, *Sanyasa* and celibacy, and instead, the acceptance of a householder's life, and the necessary creation of a society, concerned with the socio-political problems of man. The Gurus say, "One gets not to God by despising the world." "One becomes liberated even while laughing and playing."<sup>29</sup> "The God-centered lives truthfully, while a householder." The second corollary is the brotherhood of man, and equality between man and woman as well. This was a logical step following from the Gurus'

fundamental, but it was unknown, so far as the Indian contexts were concerned. For, equality between man and woman in the religious or social field, was nowhere prescribed in the religions of the world. But this was emphasised by Guru Nanak. The Guru Says, "Spiritual path can be trodden not by mere words and talk, but by actually treating all humans alike, and as one's equals. Yoga does not lie in living in cremation grounds, doing one-point meditation, roaming all over places, or visiting places of pilgrimage, but in remaining balanced and God-centered, while conducting the affairs of the world." "Why call women impure, when without women there would be none?" The Third Guru, when he created centres of religious organisations, appointed women, too, to head some of them. The third implication of the system is doing work in order to sustain life. Guru Nanak says, "The person incapable of earning his living, gets his ears split (turns a yogi), and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a guru or a saint. Do not look up to him, nor touch his feet. He alone knows the way, who earns his living, and shares his earnings with others." In this and some other hymns, the Gurus not only emphasise the necessity of work and sustaining life, but they also stress the necessity of fair distribution, saying, "God's bounty belongs to all, but men grab it for themselves." "Man gathers riches by making others miserable." "Riches cannot be accumulated without sin, but these do not keep company after death." Fair distribution of wealth, and censure of its exploitative accumulation, are clearly implied. Guru Nanak's acceptance of the invitation of Lalo, a poor carpenter, and rejection of the hospitality of Malik Bhago, the local rich landlord, also stress the same point. Fourth, as total participation in life and social responsibility in all fields, are desired, Guru Nanak condemned injustice and oppression in the political field by the rulers and invaders. He even complained to God for allowing the weak to be oppressed by the strong<sup>38</sup> This clearly implies that in the Order of God, justice, fairness and equality are the rule, and for that matter, it is essential for the seeker, the God-man and his society, to confront and remove injustice and oppression. It is for this reason that Guru Nanak stressed two points. First, that God was the Destroyer of the evil, the Punisher of the demonical,<sup>40</sup> and the Slayer of the inimical. Second, as a corollary of the above, he rejected *Ahimsa* or pacificism, as prescribed in the other Indian systems.



It is both important and significant that this fundamental principle of combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man, was enunciated by Guru Nanak, as also the four corollaries thereof. Not only that. Guru Nanak Himself laid down the foundations of the institutional structures that were necessary to implement his thesis. He led a householder's life, worked as a peasant, and organised a society, eating together from a common kitchen, and at a common platform. Second, since he felt that the organisational structure had still to be completed and matured, he started the institution of succession, and in selecting Guru Angad, a householder, as the second Guru, he left out his son, Baba Sri Chand, who was of an ascetic bent of mind. He gave Guru Angad, instructions to organise and lead a Panth' Third, Guru Nanak rejected *Ahimsa* and described his God as the Destroyer of the evil. Consequently, Guru Hargobind's statement to Sant Ramdas of Maharashtra, that his sword was for the destruction of the tyrant and for the protection of the weak, only reiterated what Guru Nanak had defined, as the attributes of God, who was both the Protector of the weak and the Punisher of the evil, and who showered His Grace, where the weak were helped. Since the entire system of the Gurus was against the tide of times and traditions, thousands-of-years-old, ten Gurus had to work and demonstrate for about 240 years their thesis, according to the targets laid down by Guru Nanak. This explains the necessity of the uncommon steps the Ten Gurus took, the new institutions they created, and the long period they spent in training, motivating and conditioning their followers to tread the path laid down by Guru Nanak. In the Indian context the Gurus' system was so revolutionary, that many a people including scholars, conditioned by their own thought and background, have failed to understand the essentiality of the measures the Sikh Gurus took, and the spiritual fundamentals of the Sikh thought.

An important implication of the Sikh theory of evolution is, that the Gurus attribute faults and evil in the society, to the imperfections of man. They repudiate the concept of a Fall, Satan or Devil. Nor do they accept the doctrines of Atonement or Sacrifices for the sins, or salvation of man. All such myths or concepts are rejected. In fact, they declare that God is benevolently helping with His Will and Grace, the process of human evolution, and the *gurmukh* has to be

the instrument of that Will. The concept of Grace is fundamental to the Gurus' thought, because it repudiates all systems of determinism, mechanical or environmental evolution, and the empirical logic of cause and effect. For, Grace implies freedom, choice and creativity. As such, it is the source of morality. Thus the ideal of individual salvation as an end in itself, is not there.

The concept of incarnation is also denied. Of course, immanence of God in the world and man is accepted. Another major implication of the Sikh thesis is its universalism. The Gurus do not assert exclusivism. For, they pray to God to save the anguished world by any means He may be gracious enough to do. In fact, they clearly contemplate co-operation with other systems or God-conscious men. For, Guru Nanak declared that his mission was, with the help of other God-conscious men, to ferry people across the turbulent sea of life. It is in this light, that we have to understand the hymns of some other saints in the Guru Granth Sahib. Considering the exclusiveness of some other religions, Guru Nanak's system is unique in its universalism.

The Gurus also make another logical but major change. As God's Will is pervasive in the entire world, the spiritual man's participation and responsibility, extend to the entire field of life and human functioning. Since injustice, oppression and evil are a fact of life, and since these are the greatest in the socio-political field, the man of God has neither to withdraw from any field, nor to remain neutral. In fact, in order to discharge his socio-moral responsibilities, he has to confront, resist and undo injustice. Hence, Guru Nanak's organisation of a Panth, rejection of *Ahimsa*, and the inevitable use of minimum force to undo injustice.

In short, whereas *Ahimsa*, monasticism, withdrawal, celibacy, ritualism and sacrifices are logical and essential in a dichotomous system, Guru Nanak at one stroke, rejected all of them. Because with his perception of an Immanent God, who is a Destroyer of the evil, he created a whole-life system with the acceptance of total responsibility to sustain life, and move towards a spiritual goal.

Conclusion: In sum, the Gurus' theory of evolution from the present stage of *manmukh* (ego-conscious man) to the higher stage of *gurmukh* (God-conscious man) is a unique contribution to the

spiritual thought of man. For, it repudiates all concepts of the fall of man, or his moral degradation from an era of *satyug* to *kalyug*. Simultaneously, it gives the seeker optimism and hope. For, God is interested in his destiny, future and progress. There is no obsession with sin, nor any system of sacrifices to atone for one's moral lapses. On the other hand, it has been stated that man at present, is at the stage of imperfection; and hence, like the infant, he has to be helped to move and run, and not to be obsessively punished for not being able immediately to gain speed. The fledgeling cannot be expected to fly. All the same, it has been repeatedly emphasised that God alone is the source of all spirituality and morality, and man's empirical life cannot rid itself of its present conflicts and wars, until it learns to draw spirituo-moral sap and support from Him.

Further, since Sikhism is universal in its approach, it claims no exclusiveness for its system, and is eager and willing to co-operate with every other religious system that seeks or aims to give succour to man and ferry him across the troubled sea of life, so as to reach the level of man's chartered destiny, proclaimed by the Gurus.

## II

### THE PROBLEM OF HERMENEUTICS

Multifarious have been the reasons for the inability of some scholars or others, to understand the spiritual thesis of the Gurus, and their theory of the spiritual evolution of man.

Revelation: One hurdle has been, especially with the so-called 'modern scholars', the issue of revelation. All the world over, religious systems and mystics accept the reality of revelation, in one form or the other. In their ontologies practically all of them believe in the existence of a Fundamental Reality, transcendent to the physical world. Many of them also conceive of its operation in the material world, and its perception by supermen. It is this intuitive perception of the Reality by prophets of the world, that has been called revelation. The hymns of the Gurus repeatedly emphasise this truth, which forms the basis of their entire spiritual system. Guru Nanak says, "O Lalo, I express what the Lord conveys me to speak." The other

Gurus also emphasise the same truth, "Nanak says the word of Truth. He expressed only the Truth; it is time to convey the Truth." "I have expressed only what You made me convey." "I have no voice of my own; all that I have said, is His Command." "Guru's words are divine nectar; these quench all spiritual thirst." "Consider the *Bani* of the *Satguru* the words of Truth. O Sikhs, it is the Lord who makes me convey them."<sup>53</sup> "The word is the Guru; my consciousness is the follower of the immanent mystic Force." "The *Bani* is the Guru, and the Guru is the *Ban*\; all spiritual truths are enshrined in it." Following their spiritual experiences, the Gurus declare, first, that there is a Higher Reality than the becoming material world, which is His creation, and, second, that the Reality informs the world, and graciously reveals itself to one who thereby attains the final level of evolution; i.e., becomes a *gurmukh*. Equally emphatic is the Guru's statement that the superman, once in contact with this Basic Reality, compulsively follows the Direction and Will (*Hukam*) of that Reality. Consequently, there can be no peace or harmony in the physical world, unless man evolves to the final stage of development; and, in tune with the Reality, moves in line with its Direction and Order.

Revelation of, contact with, or order from, the Basic Reality, has been claimed by Prophets Moses, Mohammad and Christ, as also by mystics like Eckhart and Hallaj. The lives of the prophets are the best evidence of revelation. Their activities are the outcome of their spiritual experience. Toynbee, the celebrated historian, observes, "They are not the product of their social milieu; the events that produce them, are encounters between the human beings and the Absolute Reality that is in, and at the same time, beyond the phenomenon of Existence, Life and History; and any soul may meet God at any time or place in any historical circumstances. Nevertheless, an examination of the social milieu, will help us to understand the nature, as well as the rise of religions in which this experience of meeting God, is communicated and commended to mankind, as the inspiration for a new way of life."

Significantly, in Sikhism, the claim of revelation has repeatedly been made by the Gurus themselves, and it stands authenticated in the Scripture, compiled by the Fifth Guru. In every other case, the scripture was prepared by the devotees, decades or even centuries,

after the demise of the prophet. It is a unique feature of the Gurus' system, and shows the great care they took to define their system, so that its purity is maintained, and it is not misunderstood or misconstrued. Hence, the yardstick which we apply to assess the claims of the followers of other religions, cannot be used in the case of the Guru Granth Sahib. Very sagaciously, the Guru has excluded the relevance of any textual criticism, form criticism or redaction criticism and the like. Even if the authenticity and validity of revelation is not accepted, it can certainly be understood and logically deduced from its evident spiritual, moral and empirical consequences. Unfortunately, in modern times, the burden of social science methodology is so heavy, that even persons believing in the Transcendent Reality and the intervention of revelation, are not able to shake it off. Some of them tend to relate prophetic or revelatory systems to empirical or environmental causes. To do so, is a contradiction in terms. Anything which is revelatory, is from the realm that is free, and is ungoverned by empirical or the mechanical laws of the world of cause and effect. The Transcendent, by its very definition, is beyond the empirical logic, it being a world of Freedom and Grace. For, His Will and Grace have no causal relation, with a world that is determined. It is, therefore, pathetic to find persons having faith in God or the Transcendent, explaining basic religious developments by social or environmental causes. Major social and historical developments have been the product of a revelation or a spiritual event. For, by its definition, a revelation or a spiritual event cannot be the result of a social development, although it could be the cause of it. In view of the *Bani* in the Guru Granth Sahib, it is essential to interpret it and the history of the Guru period, in the light of the spiritual phenomena and culture, of which these are the product. For, God described by the Guru has an Altruistic and Gracious Will, which operates in the world. He is the Ocean of Values, and for that matter, the Fount of all morality and ethics. Because, morality has a significance, only if man has the freedom of choice, and his moral activity is undetermined.

Materialistic Explanations Examined: Following the empirical method of cause and effect, some scholars suggest that Sikhism is a

syncretism, or a growth occurring under the impact of *bhakti*, *shakti*, Christian, Islamic or environmental influences. First, let us take the Hindu systems, especially its *bhakti* sects. Guru Nanak rejected almost every principle of these sects, i.e., their faith in the Vedas and *upanishads* as the sole scriptures, in *sanyasa*, in *ahimsa*, in the efficacy of rituals, *mantras*, fasts, pilgrimages and sacrifices, in meditation and yogic methodology as an end in itself, in celibacy and downgrading of women, in the theory of incarnation and personal salvation, in the religiously sanctioned hierarchical division of the caste ideology, etc. In fact, no Hindu, except a *Sanyasi* or *Bairagi*, could be without a caste tag. Even in the liberal *bhakti* system of *Chaitanya*, the priests were Brahmins.

Second, we come to the system of radical *bhagats*, like Kabir and Namdev. They were all believers in personal salvation, in *ahimsa*, and even in withdrawal and other-worldliness. Serious prejudice against woman and marriage was there. *Bhagat* Kabir has been considered a mesogynist, and *Bhagat* Shankradeva, a contemporary of Guru Nanak, said, "Of all the terrible aspirations of the world, woman's is the ugliest. A slight side-glance of hers captivates even the hearts of celebrated sages. Her sight destroys prayer, penance and meditation. Knowing this the wise keep away from the company of women." Murthi writes about him that "to trouble about the improvement of social conditions, deemed to him as little profitable."<sup>59</sup> Whereas none of the *bhagats* ever sought to organise a society, or to appoint a successor for the purpose, it was Guru Nanak, who at the very outset, not only created a society with a common kitchen, but also started the chain of successors, so that his socio-spiritual mission could mature and fructify. In fact, both Hindu sects and the radical *bhagats*, belong to the dichotomous category of religions, in which *ahimsa* (pacificism), withdrawal, *sanyasa*, and celibacy or downgrading of women, are religious values. In a whole-life system all those are rejected, and socio-moral responsibilities are accepted, and minimum use of force to discharge them is approved. For, the very goal of life, ethics, and methodology in Sikhism, on the one hand, and those in the above two cases, on the other, are different, and, to an extent, contrasted.

The position of Christianity with its pacificism, monasteries and nunneries, and goal of personal salvation, is no different. The

syncretic argument, thus, is very thin. Since Jeremiah, for six hundred years there were pacifist and other-worldly sects in Judaism, like Essenes, Kabbalists and others, and yet Christ's originality has not been in doubt. But in a country with a dichotomous and pacifist tradition of over 2,000 years, Guru Nanak's whole-life system cannot rationally be called a syncretism, or a part of the *bhakti* systems. °

If we consider Sikhism a *bhakti* system, we can never explain how it was that in 1975, when Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency Laws and abrogated all civil liberties, it was only the Sikhs who organised from the precincts of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, a peaceful and continuous protest for years, involving the imprisonment of 40,000 volunteers, while in the rest of India of 750 millions, no social group, much less a religious group, organised, or sent even two scores of volunteers for protest. In fact, Vinobha Bhave, the spiritual successor of Mahatma Gandhi, called the Emergency a good disciplinary measure. Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, sister of late Jawaharlal Nehru, paid a handsome tribute to the Akalis for their brave resistance to the Emergency. She said, "Punjab which had always been in the forefront of resistance of oppression, kept its colours flying, during the Emergency also. It was in Punjab and Punjab alone, that a large scale resistance was organised against it. The worst thing that happened during the Emergency was that a brave nation was frightened into submission, and nobody spoke, except in hushed tones. In Dehra Dun, where I was, I hung my head in shame, and wondered, if this was the Bharat for which we, the freedom fighters, had suffered. Even those, not actually in prison, were no less than in jail. Only in Punjab the Akalis organised a *morcha* (protest) against this. Punjab's lead in such matters should continue." The contrast between the socio-religious ethos of Hindu religious sects, and that of Sikhism, is evident. Similarly, James Lewis, who made a detailed analysis of the syncretic theory, writes: "From this perspective, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the syncretism appellation probably originated with English missionaries or some other group of colonial officials who regarded the Sikh religion as spurious."

"If someone were to argue that "syncretism" has lost its negative, judgemental connotations, we can ask, why, then, are the major

religions of the West never described as "syncretisms"? In other words, there is basically nothing wrong with the observation that both Muslim and Hindu influences are evident in the Sikh religion, as long as one does not fail to note that the same state of affairs exists in other religious traditions. Christianity, for example, was shaped by Judaism, Mithraism, Neoplatonism, and other Hellenistic religions. And, not just during the period of their birth, but also over the course of later contact with other peoples, all of the major world traditions have been influenced, to some extent, by other religions. Why, then, is it appropriate to refer to Sikhism as a "syncretism", but not appropriate to thus refer to other religions? In other words, if a faith like Christianity cannot appropriately be called a "syncretism," then what term would apply to Christianity's particular blend of influences that could not apply to Sikhism?

"With a little reflection, it should be apparent that there is no clear criterion for distinguishing Sikhism from other religious traditions on this point. The covert judgment, and here we are finally in a position to state the evaluation implicit in this seemingly neutral term, is that Sikhism can be understood entirely in terms of its constituent religions, whereas other traditions are somehow "more," or that they somehow "transcend," the religions from which their constituents are derived. To restate this value-judgment as bluntly as possible, the founders of other traditions were somehow able to provide a special (creative? revealed?) element to their new spiritual synthesis that was somehow missing in the case of Guru Nanak."

"I am, of course, exaggerating the point, but it needs to be made perfectly clear that the characterization of the Sikh tradition as a "syncretism" is a holdover from the days when all of the other world religions were compared with Christianity for the purpose of demonstrating Christianity's superiority. Although I recognize that present-day scholars do not consciously intend to pronounce such a judgement against Sikhism, the fact that "syncretism" continues to be used differently to describe some religions but not others indicates that this judgement has not ceased to shape interpretations of the Sikh tradition.<sup>161</sup>



"Given the popularity of this state of affairs, it would not be inappropriate to postulate some kind of unconscious repression-projection mechanism at work that might explain the scholars' lack of even-handedness. One does not have to be a psychoanalyst to perceive that the guilt about the gap between one's ideals and one's behaviour can be pushed out of the light of full awareness only to re-emerge as a projection. In lieu of a better explanation of the one-sided treatment of the Sikh religion by Westerners, it appears to the present writer that the relevant scholars are uncomfortable with the contradictions between the theory and practice of their own traditions, but have repressed the problem and have projected the contradiction on to Sikhism, a tradition that apparently (but not actually) contains the same contradiction. Thus their condemnation of Sikh militancy is really a projection of their own (unexpressed, repressed) condemnation of the Christian tradition. The point here is not to criticise Christianity, -but rather to once again point out the different treatment that the Sikh religion has received at the hands of Western scholars. These kinds of evaluative statements would have been less objectionable, had similar criticism been levelled against other religious traditions as well."

The argument about the influence of Islam is equally without substance. For, not only are its ideas of Fall of man, Satan, Sin, exclusivism, Prophet Mohammed being the Seal of Prophets, and acceptance of slavery, variant from the Sikh concepts, but Sufism, the face of Islam in India, was itself a system of withdrawal and personal salvation. It never accepted any social responsibility, much less did it think of confronting Moghal oppression in the state. In fact, like Christianity in the British colonial period, Sufism took advantage of the prestige and protection Muslim rule gave to it. It is on record that the Head of Nakshabandi Sect of Islam congratulated Emperor Jehangir on the execution of Guru Arjun Dev. But the greatest contrast is that while Sikhism raised the level, both social and moral, and the sense of self esteem of the lowest sectors of the society, Indian converts to Islam continued, by and large, at the low level at which they had lived earlier. Niebuhr, a distinguished Christian theologian of the century, had argued, "that because of the evil in man and in society, Christian political action called not only for love but for an

attempt to give each group within society enough power to defend itself against exploitation by other groups. Although relations between individuals might be a matter of ethics, relations between groups were a matter of politics." In the religious and political history of man, it is a remarkable achievement of the Sikh Gurus, that the socio-moral and political status of the lowest classes, has nowhere else been raised to a higher level than that in the Sikh society.

Apart from the contrasted ideological position of Sikhism with the contemporary systems, one major fact alone demolishes the environmental arguments, namely, Guru Nanak's religious stand about equality of man and woman. In the religious or social systems of the world there was not an iota of evidence to give rise to the radical approach of the Sikh Gurus on this issue of socio-spiritual equality of man and woman; or of social justice, as a whole, in the caste-ridden society of India. Not only Shudras like Kalals, Ranghretas and Ramgarhias, became leaders of the Sikh Community, but the Third Guru appointed women to head some of the religious districts, when he constituted 22 of them in the country. Shankara calls woman, "the gateway to hell." For Ramanuja, woman is sin-born. The position of women in other religious system of the world, including that of radical *bhagats*, as mentioned earlier, is certainly not of equality with men. It ranges between her being considered a temptress and being regarded as second rate. No environmental theory can explain this radical change Guru Nanak made. The only explanation for it, as stated by him, is his revelation, or what he calls the Will of God, and His immanence (*Naam*).

Singularity of Spiritual Experience which is Noetic: William James, who made a detailed study of the religious experiences of mystics, clearly records that those are also noetic in character, i.e. they give knowledge. This knowledge, as stated by Plato, is true and not opinions. Its authenticity accounts for the certitude of mystics who are willing to lay down their lives pursuant to its call or logic. Both Christianity and Islam give God the symbol of Light. Guru Nanak, in the very opening line in the Guru Granth Sahib, calls Him Enlightener and Gracious. While the Gurus clearly recommend the use of reason and one's sense of discrimination for moral purposes,

they repeatedly emphasise that the real knowledge and Guidance come from His Will (*raza*). In fact, they call it the final and the ultimate Source of all knowledge and direction. Collingwood in his, *Idea of History*, states that "It would be nearer the truth to say that in religion the life of reflection is concentrated in its intensest form, and that the special problems of theoretical and practical life all take their special form by segregation out of the body of religious consciousness, and retain their vitality only so far as they preserve their connection with it and with each other in it." Toynbee also concedes that "the historians' point of view is not incompatible with the belief that God has revealed Himself to man for the purpose of helping man to gain spiritual salvation."<sup>68</sup> Of course, there is a difference in the concept of salvation as between Christianity and Sikhism. A Christian like Saint Augustine, believes that salvation is an other-worldly event, and he did not expect "the world to get better"; or "that the spread of Christianity would ensure political and economic improvement. The earthy city of self-will would continue to exist amidst the rise and fall of states and empires." We have already stated that Guru Nanak's thesis was whole-life, and envisaged the expression of spirituality in the empirical life of man as well.

It is evident, as has been recorded by many students of religion, that there is variation in the spiritual experiences of different mystics or prophets. The Gurus stress that the historical expression of their lives, is in pursuance of the spiritual direction and knowledge the Will of God supplies. The Gurus say, "They who know His Will, carry it out."<sup>70</sup> "Wonderful is His Will; if one walks in His Will, then one knows how to lead the life of Truth." Bergson, too, expresses a similar opinion, "The ultimate end of mysticism is establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests. This effort is of God, if it is not God Himself. The great mystic is to be conceived as an individual being capable of transcending limitations imposed by its material nature, thus continuing and extending the divine action. Such is our definition."<sup>72</sup>

Importance of History in Sikh Hermeneutics, and Unity of Perception, Ideology and Deed: For the proper understanding of a religious system, and in appreciating its different doctrines in their

proper perspective, it is essential to bear the unity of perception, ideology and activities in mind. Let us explain what we mean by the unity of perception, ideology and activity. Almost every religion owes its origin to the mystic or religious experience of some prophet. Actually, it is this experience which forms the real fount of the entire ideology, mission and activities of the mystic. In this sequence, the first stage is the perception or the religious experience. At the second stage, the saint, naturally, tries to understand and absorb it, and reacts to it. This is the stage where reflective thought appears. This reaction constitutes both the ideology and proposed plan of the saint for giving practical shape to the ideology. This ideology and plan are generally understood and interpreted by others from the words expressed, or other means of communication resorted to by the saint. This forms his real response to his religious experience, and reflects his ideology and decisions made thereunder. For example, if the religious experience of a mystic is that God is Love, is the Shelter of the shelterless, and Help of the helpless, the mystic's ideology is that God is the Ocean of virtues and a God of attributes. In line with it, and as a reaction to this experience, he compulsively frames a plan of action of love and help to the poor and the needy. Accordingly, the activities undertaken and the programmes initiated and executed by the saint, are the true reflection and projection of his religious experience and the consequent ideology. The activities of the saint are only the form and shape which the basic experience directs and takes. Mystics can rarely express in words fully the nature of their experience, it being generally ineffable. And even if they do, the description is so often interpreted variously. For the same reason, even the statements of these persons, cannot always be very clear, being sometimes too brief or merely symbolic. It is in the interpretation of these statements that students of religion and others make major errors of understanding and deduction. But it is the deeds and activities of the person, that portray truly and directly his or her religious experience and ideology. All we seek to stress is, first, the inalienable unity of experience, ideology and activity; and, second, the activities of the saint alone being the right key to the understanding and appreciation of his or her perceptions and message. So often, mere statements,

taken in isolation, have been wrongly interpreted, especially by those distant in time and space. Because, howsoever sophisticated these be, rational tools cannot rise above the prejudices and predilections of the person employing them.

We have, therefore, to re-emphasise the very special position of Sikh hermeneutics. We have no access to the actual spiritual experience of the Gurus, nor can we be aware of the deliberations consequent to the experience in the consciousness of the prophets. We are aware only of the activities and the expression of their decisions. This expression is either in the form of words or deeds. Here comes a major difference. In the case of almost every other system, the Scripture is a *post-facto* man-made construction, recorded decades or even centuries later. The debate has continued as to how far the record could be true, considering the known human weakness to remain subservient to personal or social influences. This handicap does not exist in the case of Guru Granth Sahib, which stands authenticated by the Guru himself. The second point is that expression in the form of deed has always been considered clearer than the word. This is for two important reasons. The expression in words can at best be general or theoretical in nature. For, this expression must seek to cover all possible eventualities that may arise in the future, and which possibilities can never be anticipated or guessed completely. In short, word is the penultimate step in the expression of spiritual perceptions, of which deed is the concrete, unambiguous and final step in a comparatively specific flux of events. For this reason it is easier to understand and less liable to misinterpretation than the word.

The second point about the word is that it is a secondary mode of expression, and, for that matter, it can never be as clear and concrete as the deed. Language, at any rate, is always a pre-existing vehicle of communication. It has its own changing nuances, and many a time, its roots extend to a distant cultural past. Obviously, language, being a second hand vehicle of expression, its truth is more liable to misinterpretation than that of deed which is not only particular to the author, but is also clearly related as a response to known or identifiable set of events. For this reason, apart from being accurate and direct, it is simpler and easier to comprehend. Hence our emphasis

that by losing sight of the historical perspective and hastenning to go by a literal interpretation, we may so often miss the real meaning of the *bani*. For this reason the lives of the Gurus are of fundamental importance, to enable us to understand the real import of the words of the Gurus. For example, in *Asa de Var*, the Guru sings:

*"Sache tere khand sache brahmand,  
Sache tere loe sache akar,"*

and again:

*"Kur raja kurparja kur sabh sansar."*

To a casual reader these hymns would appear discrepant, which they are not, if one keeps in view, how the Gurus led their lives. The first hymn stresses the reality of the world, so that we do not withdraw from it, and instead, ensure responsible participation. The second hymn, while referring to life's evanescence, deprecates lust for power and wealth, and describes it as vain. For, in the *Japuji*, Guru Nanak clearly prescribes that the goal is to work in life, in line with the Altruistic Will of God. The truth of the hymns becomes explicit, when we keep in mind, how in their lives the Gurus worked, struggled and suffered their martyrdoms. The Tenth Nanak, almost from his childhood, had to face a most intense strife, which, for any ordinary human being, would have been impossible to bear, because of its pressures, anguish and tragedies. This being the context, it is impossible to conclude that the Gurus considered life to be false and illusory. In the absence of a close study of the lives of the Gurus, it is not possible to be clear about the subtleties and depths of the *bani*. Hence the fundamental importance of the exemplary lives of the Gurus in Sikh hermeneutics. The *bani* says that those who know His Will, carry it out. It was the Altruistic Will of God, the Gurus were following in their lives.

In the above context, let us see what the Guru did for us to reduce all possibilities of misunderstanding or misinterpretation. In the case of the word, the Guru himself authenticated. As to the clearly understandable expression of the deed, Guru Nanak lived for us in ten lives for 240 years. He lived, worked, struggled, organised a Panth, sacrificed and martyred, while facing all sets of events, eventualities and milieus, social and political. The above are the two unique steps Guru Nanak has taken to make his system clear to us,

and to solve our problems of interpretation. Hence the fundamental importance of the history of the Guru period in Sikh hermeneutics.

Sikhism and Its Historical Role: Revelation does not mean that the students of religion should not seek to synchronize the historical events with the spiritual thesis of the mystic. In fact, our emphasis is, that Sikh history is a product of the Sikh thesis, which is a revelation. In this short essay it is not possible for us to portray all the historical events, that have followed from the Gurus' spiritual view of life. But we shall refer to only two points.

(a) Social Responsibility: Guru Nanak prescribed four empirical responsibilities for the spiritual man, namely, to secure the brotherhood of man, second, the importance of work and sustenance of life, third, fair distribution of wealth and the bounties of nature, and fourth, justice in society and confrontation with the unjust and the oppressor of the weak. Hardly a prophet or *bhagat*, in the statement of his thesis, has so clearly enumerated the faults of the contemporary socio-political life, as did Guru Nanak. These four components of empirical life, provided the structural foundations of related new institutions, so that his successors could develop them to fructify. Although the evolutionary processes in socio-political life and conditioning have always been extremely slow, yet progress in the four fields has been visibly significant. Equality in the Sikh society has been distinctly at a comparatively higher level. It was a fraternization unknown on the Indian soil. Apart from bringing about improvement in the social equality and human relations, the very time Banda gained political power, he undertook distribution of land among the peasantry, so as to raise the economic level of the lowest people in the state. And, it is well known that the Sikh masses constitute the real strength of the Sikh community. The second achievement is the work habit among the Sikhs, for which they are well known the world over. That the Green Revolution was first brought about in Punjab, whereas the wherewithal and pre-requisites for it, were as well available elsewhere in India and Asia, also demonstrates their zest for work and life. Further., it is significant that a very tiny section of the community in the country, Punjab, not only suffered and survived extreme persecution and destruction, but also was able to supplant a mighty Empire and repulse, once and for all times, the thousand-year

wave of invasions from north-west of India. And, compared to his contemporary rulers in Maharashtra and elsewhere, Ranjit Singh's rule was far more fair and humane. He made available all opportunities arising in his administration, civil, political or military, to every section of the community, without any communal, religious or other discrimination. The ethos of his functioning was such, that neither was there any attempt at conversion, nor was there the least feeling of revenge or discrimination against the Muslims for the persecution, the Sikhs and their Gurus had suffered during the Moghal rule. This is evident from the fact that, in the Anglo-Sikh wars, the Muslim soldiers fought with the same loyalty, zeal and valour as did the Sikhs. And the bard who sang the swan song of the tragic fall of this benevolent Administration, was a Muslim.

(b) Sikhism and Militancy. The second point relates to militancy and political objectives. Without a close study of the spiritual thesis of the Gurus, there have been lazy suggestions, mostly by scholars drawn from dichotomous or pacifist religions, or from believers in the environmental evolution of man, that militancy in the Sikh religion was the result of social or environmental factors.

Let us examine this view, piece by piece. First is the Ideological factors about the use of force for a righteous cause. Dichotomous religions apart, there is no religion, except Christianity, which, while recommending a householder's life, does not accept use of force, as the last resort, to discharge one's social responsibility. For, in them withdrawal or *sanyasa* is never a value. It is so in Judaism, Islam and Sikhism. For outsiders, it has sometimes not been easy to understand the position of Exodus or Torah in the Old Testament, the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament, and the Just-War theory of Later Christianity. In the revelation of Moses, God clearly goaded Jews to attack and drive out the Canaanites, saying, "My angel goes before you, and brings you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and Jebusites, and I annihilate them; you shall not bow down to their gods in worship and follow their practices, but shall tear them down and smash their pillars to bits." Out of the commandments prescribed for war, one is, "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth," etc.<sup>76</sup> Six hundred years later, prophet Jeremiah suggested pacifism against the Babylonian attack. Later,



followed the pacifist cults of Essenes and others. It is true, that Christ's emphasis on pacifism in the Sermon on the Mount, is unambiguous, and forms the fundamental basis of Christian theology. However, since Christianity has become a state religion, the concept of a just-war has appeared. Dr Walsh says that, at present, it is virtually the accepted doctrine by most sections of Christianity, except the Anna-Baptists and a few others.

Evidently, pacifism and a whole-life system cannot go together. As suggested by theologian Niebuhr, Liberation theologians, and other noted Christians, the use of political action for a righteous cause, becomes inevitable, if social responsibility has to be discharged. Let us examine the position of two noted pacifists of the century. Pacifist philosopher Bertrand Russell, who had courted arrest during the First World War, suggested, after the Second World War, that in order to avoid the appalling disaster of a Russian victory, threat of force, or, if necessary, actual use of force should be made against the USSR, so as to impose on it, the rule of a democratic world government. Pacifist Mahatma Gandhi cut out an equally sorry figure. At the beginning of the Second World War, pacifists of the world wrote to Mahatma Gandhi for guidance and advice. He felt distressed and baffled, but had hardly an answer. Maulana Azad writes that more than once he thought of committing suicide, saying that if he was helpless to avoid it, he would at least not be a witness to the holocaust. But, as is well-known, later he became prepared to join the war effort, provided India was given autonomy; and again he approved of the sending of Indian forces in Kashmir to maintain Kashmir Maharaja's accession to India and to repel the Pakistan-backed tribal intrusion. The greatest constitutional lawyer of India, H.M. Seervai, has examined Mahatma's principle of non-violence and come to the conclusion that "there is little doubt that Gandhi used non-violence as a political weapon, and was prepared to support, or connive at violence to secure political goals." All this exposes the bankruptcy of pacifism in human affairs, especially when a religion seeks to solve socio-political problems. The logic is clear in a system that accepts social responsibility, and seeks to provide succour for the poor, the downtrodden or the oppressed. Injustice and oppression being the greatest in the socio-political field, in no way can these be resisted or undone, except by the

minimum use of force by an organised society. Hence the sanction for it in Judaism, Islam and Sikhism.

There is a common misunderstanding that a doctrine of Love, *ipso facto* implies non-violence. The logic of love, points just the other way. How can one remain neutral and unconcerned, or shirk using minimum force, if the very person or the cause one loves is in jeopardy, or under attack? Social responsibility, or succour to the oppressed, is an essential counterpart of love of your neighbour. Inevitably, love or social responsibility and pacificism cannot always go together.

Pacifism is consistent only where the ideal is individual salvation and/or withdrawal from life, which is considered a suffering, *mithya* or an avoidable entanglement. In fact, whole-life religions have regarded the approach of withdrawal as escapist or self-centered.

In this context, we have to see what is the stand of the Gurus on the issue. Guru Nanak has defined God as the Director of the World, the Helper of the weak and the oppressed, and Destroyer of the evil. For him, oppression of the weak and injustice are not consonant with the Order of God. This implies that the God-conscious man, who has to be His instrument, must resist and undo injustice. Since political injustice can be undone only by a society, by the use of force, if necessary, it was he who rejected *Ahimsa*, initiated the organisation of his Panth, and started the institution of succession, so as to develop and direct its growth, and to enable it to achieve the targets fixed by him.

Sikhism and Its Socio-Political Role: Some outsiders feel that the first five Gurus were pacifists. But, facts do not support this contention. Guru Nanak himself directed Guru Angad that he had to lead a Panth. The Third Guru, in order to expand the organisation of the Sikh society created 22 districts of socio-religious administration, with a head at each Centre, covering almost the entire expanse of India from Dacca to Kabul. He created new institutions to develop an independent sense of Sikh consciousness and identity. The Fourth Guru founded Amritsar as a religious as well as business centre. The role of the Fifth Guru showed unambiguously what part the future Sikh society would play. Contemporary evidence of Mohsin Fani, the

Emperor himself, and others is clear. He prescribed the system of Daswandh or 10% contribution of one's earnings by every Sikh, and strengthened the institution of *Masands* for its collection. This made it plain to everyone that a parallel religio-secular society, with deep motivation was being created. These collections were used for religious as well as secular purposes. The *Masands* also dealt with secular problems of the Sikhs. In fact, since Guru Nanak, as stated by Bhai Gurdas, the Gurus were called *Sacha Padshah*, and their followers looked up to them for solution of their problems, mundane or spiritual. Mohsin Fani records that the Fifth Guru erected lofty buildings, kept horses, and even elephants, and maintained retainers. " He also organised trade of horses and commerce. On his own behalf, and otherwise, he sent Sikhs to Central Asia to procure and trade in horses. Gupta, the distinguished historian, writes that the Guru had in every respect created a 'state within a state'. According to Khuasa-tu-twarikh (Persian), the Guru successfully interceded with Emperor Akbar for reduction in the land revenue imposed on the hard-pressed peasantry. The Guru's compiling the Granth was an obvious declaration of the ideological independence of the Sikh society. It is because of his religio-secular status that Chandu Shah, a senior official of the Moghal Administration, offered the hand of his daughter to Guru Hargobind. But the crucial event was help to Khusro. Mohsin Fani records that the Guru blessed Khusro, the rebel Prince, after Jehangir's accession to the throne. Indian historians like Jadunath Sircar, Latif and Beni Parsad, record that monetary assistance was also given to the Prince. Beni Parsad in his History of Jehangir, puts the amount at Rs 5,000. Both because of the secular status and political potential of the Sikh society, and the Guru's help to the rebel Prince, claiming the throne, the incident came significantly to the notice of the Emperor. Jehangir, in his autobiography, records that for three or four generations the Sikh Gurus had been successfully creating a society, and thereby misleading the folk, Hindus and Muslims. He, therefore, felt that it was time that he put a stop to it, and accordingly, ordered the execution of the Guru, as also the imposition of a fine and confiscation of his property. The Dabistan records that the unpaid fine was demanded even from the Sixth Master. It is inconceivable that an Emperor in Delhi would take notice of a peaceful religious group, or order such a drastic action as

he did, or consider the event of such importance as to record it in his autobiography, unless the development and aims of the Guru and his Panth had been considered by him of serious socio-political potential and proportions. Had the Guru's activities been felt to be purely of a salvation or a quietist saint, there could never be any question of an Administration and the Emperor having taken note of the organisation, assessed its likely effects on the polity, and ordered its being nipped in the bud. That the development was both significant and well-known, and had invited jealousy, is also evident by the reaction of the politically important Head of the Naqshabandi Sect of Islam at Sirhind, who conveyed his delight and congratulations at the Emperor having eliminated the Fifth Guru.

The other part of the story is equally clear. Obviously, the Guru envisaged confrontation with the Empire. He could never be unaware of what would be the result of his help to the rebel Prince, who was moving with his army, and had claimed the throne. Simultaneously, it is also on record that Guru Hargobind, even in the time of the Fifth Master, had been having military training, and joining hunting parties. All evidence makes it plain that Guru Hargobind knew clearly from his father, as to what course had been followed by the Sikh society, and what were its future plans or aims. Otherwise, it is impossible to conceive that Guru Hargobind on the very first day of his Guruship should equip himself with two swords, and don a military dress. All this makes it clear that the socio-political objectives of the Sikh society had become clearly visible, even from the time of the Fifth Guru. The Guru's martyrdom was, from his own angle, a voluntary step, taken to prepare his people for the struggle initiated by Guru Nanak. On the part of the Emperor, his order was a necessary step to stop the growth of the Sikh movement. In a whole-life ideology, martyrdom is not an act of suicide, sacrifice or atonement, but it is a calculated step to stop aggression, if that could be possible, and simultaneously an essential lead to prepare, and strengthen the will of the people for the struggle and sacrifices.

Guru Hargobind's military activities are well known. He created a fort at Amritsar, and the institution of the Akal Takhat, the symbol of the Miri-Piri system of Guru Nanak. It is clear that the Guru took to the militant path as a positive step, and not under any

social or political pressure, or for personal defence. The Guru had openly declared his policy to punish the tyrant and protect the weak. He kept 700 horses and fought six battles with the Moghal Forces, several thousand strong. In one of his successful battles at guruser he lost 1200 men. He even recruited mercenaries to train his people and to create a regular army. The Seventh Master, who on all accounts was personally of a very compassionate temperament, maintained an army of 2000, which was quite a sizeable force. Another political move of the Guru was extremely significant. When Dara, a rival claimant to the throne, was moving with his army, he met him and offered military assistance. Just as Jehangir never forgot Guru Arjun's aid to rebel Khusro, Aurangzeb did not fail to note Guru Har Rai's offer of assistance to his elder brother claiming the throne. Significantly, the Seventh Master took this step knowing full well that his grandfather's assistance to Khusro had led to his martyrdom. Evidently, had the policy of the Sikh Gurus been to avoid confrontation with the Empire, or to give up militancy and socio-political objectives, the Seventh Master would never have offered military help to Dara. In the socio-political growth of the Sikh society, the part played by the Ninth Master, is very meaningful and ideologically important. Governor Timur Shah, son of Ahmed Shah Abdali, writes in his 'Hakikat-i-Bana-wa-Uruj-Firqa-i- Sikhan', that it was reported to Aurangzeb that the Guru was creating a new nation, and was making military preparations. On this the Emperor conveyed to the Guru that if he gave up his political and military role, and confined his activities to preaching and prayers, he would be given state grants for that purpose. The Guru declined the offer, and his consequent martyrdom at the hands of the Empire is the second major event in the Sikh confrontation with the Moghal Administration, so as to inspire and steel his men for the final confrontation.

The Tenth Master's militant role and his armed confrontations with the Empire, were protracted, long and decisive. From his very boyhood he strengthened his military preparations, fortified Anandpur, and proclaimed an independent political status. His clash with the local Hill Princes, thus, became inevitable. He, too, recruited mercenaries for his army and his battles. After the great event of his creating the Khalsa, he invited the Hill Princes to join him in his

liberation struggle against the Empire. Owing to fundamental ideological differences they did not accept the Guru's suggestion.<sup>94</sup> Instead, they joined the Imperial Forces against the Guru. In this struggle, he lost all his four sons and his mother, but he continued the confrontation uninterrupted and undismayed. It was he who deputed Banda to mount an attack on Sirhind, and sent *Hukamnamas* to his Sikhs to join and support him. The message which his spouse Mata Sundri, later conveyed to the Sikhs, made two things clear. First, that Banda's mandate was to supplant the Moghal Administration, and second, that political sovereignty was to be with the Sikh Panth.<sup>96</sup>

Sikhism: A Miri-Piri System: The above facts should enable us to understand Sikh history as the product of Sikh ideology. For, unless we grasp the intimate relation between the two, often problems of interpretation arise. Sikhism is a whole-life, *Miri-Piri* or *sant-sipahi* religion. The three terms are synonymous, and convey a single concept, and not a combination of two concepts. For, Guru's concept of God (True Emperor) or spirituality, is incomplete or partial without an essential and inalienable combination of the spiritual life with the empirical life. Spirituality and its attributes have to be expressed in and enrich the latter, which, without drawing the spiritual and moral sap from the former, remains egoistic and barren. In Guru Nanak's system God himself is engaged in the socio-spiritual development of man. He does not want the spiritual man to withdraw to Him, but wants him to be the agent of His Altruistic Will. Man has not been left alone by God to fight lone battles with Satan. He is a Benevolent Helper, enabling man to remove and shed his imperfections, resulting from his egoism at the present level. The spiritual man, as stated by Guru Nanak, has to ferry others across the turbulent sea of life. The concept of personal salvation, as in some other religions, by withdrawing from the empirical life, is distinctly denied. A dichotomous system or the modern concept of Secularism, governing empirical life, leaves the society to devise its own ethics. Thus,

secularism has led to the appearance in the twentieth century, of the biggest ruling monsters, civilised history -has known. For, the Frankenstein of military power, modern science has placed with the state or its ruler, virtually makes it impossible for the downtrodden or the weak, to defy him or dislodge him from his self-chosen path, howsoever evil or disastrous it may be.

It is a whole-life or a *Miri-Piri* thesis that Guru Nanak and Guru Granth Sahib have laid down; and the Ten Masters or the Ten *Gurmukhs* have demonstrated for 240 years how to live it under all combinations of circumstances. It is because of the completely radical nature of their religion, that they took so long to show in life how to live every aspect of their system, and thereby, to motivate and condition the Sikhs in their faith. The lives of the Gurus for over 240 years are a lesson in interpretation or hermeneutics.

The Guru Granth Sahib itself stresses that all the Gurus express a single unified thesis, representing the same spirit. Guru Gobind Singh has stated that they are all a unity, and express the same spiritual gospel. In fact, he emphasises that unless this is realised and recognised, there can be no success in understanding the Sikh thesis, and that it would be foolish to believe otherwise. That is also the reason that in the entire Guru Granth Sahib, only the word 'Nanak' has been used to convey the authorship of all the hymns and messages of the Gurus therein. This emphasis is not without meaning.

A superficial reading of the hymns of the Ninth Guru would suggest to an outsider that he was a pacifist. But historical evidence of Governor Timur Shah, quoted earlier, that the Guru declined to stop his military and political activities, as desired by the Emperor, is exactly contrary to it. By his confrontation and the consequent martyrdom, the Guru prepared his people for the final role the Tenth Master had to play. Evidently, he could not be unaware of the consequences of the rejection of the Emperor's offer. And yet, as in the case of the Fifth Master, he, in order to help Kashmiri Pandits, sought martyrdom as a part of his socio-political struggle, and to inspire and strengthen the people's faith in the mission.

Creation of Khalsa - an Epitomic Event: The creation of the Khalsa was the epitomic achievement of Guru Nanak's mission. Guru Gobind Singh prescribed five *kakkas* for the Sikhs, including a *kirpan*. Quite often the significance of the *kirpan* (sword) as an essential wear of the Sikhs, has been missed. But it emphasises two important principles, which the Guru wants the Sikh to remember, namely, his duty to confront injustice and oppression, and second, to stop the Sikhs from escape into withdrawal and monasticism. It is in this context, that one has to understand the outstanding role and

contribution of the Sikhs, in fighting the Moghals and the invaders in the 18th century, for Indian Independence in the 20th century, and during the encroachment on all human rights and liberties, following the imposition of Emergency Laws in 1975. Can any historian, or sociologist explain why in history no other political, social or religious section of India rose to struggle or protest?

Our conclusion is plain. Neither Sikh ideology in the Guru Granth Sahib, nor Sikh history can be understood in isolation. It is impossible to grasp one without the other. For, each historical event, social development or institution, is part of a multi-dimensional process, which, in turn, is an essential and positive empirical projection of the ideology of Guru Nanak and the Guru Granth Sahib. As such, Sikh history is the best explanation and index of the Sikh ideology.

Sikhism — A System of Evolution: Sikhism is an evolutionary theory about the spirituo-empirical development of man. We can never understand the human process, its psychology and its spirituality, by experimenting with and dissecting the lower animals or examining material processes. Our scientific tools cannot yield any information about what is not discernible in the life of animal or the state of matter. The sufferings, trials, tortures and martyrdoms through which the moral man or the spiritual person can go without flinching, cannot be understood by any principle of cause and effect, or egoism, which is the present level of man. But the *gurmukh* is as spontaneous in his altruistic activities and sacrifices, as the normal man is egoist in his thought and deed. For, the latter cannot rise above his organic or constitutional level, which is governed by his ego-consciousness. In the same way *the gurmukh* with his universal consciousness cannot help or refrain from being altruistic, which is his compulsive mission. Freedom, creativity, spirituality or morality are virtually synonymous terms expressing a higher level of consciousness. Somewhat similar thought is suggested by a modern thinker, "The inner world seen as fields of knowledge (.....) is the world of freedom, the 'outer world' (....) is the world of necessity." "It is dying to oneself, to one's likes and dislikes, to all one's egocentric occupations. To the extent one succeeds in this, one ceases to be directed from outside, and also ceases to be self-directed. One has gained



or one might say, one is then God-directed." The only<sup>100</sup> freedom, difference with the above thought is, that although the two levels have been clearly brought out, one cannot be partially God-directed and partially self-directed. For, that would be a contradiction in terms. The Guru says, "Ego-consciousness and God-consciousness are contrary; the two cannot be at one place."<sup>11</sup> For, the moment universal consciousness is achieved, ego-consciousness disappears. In the case of *gurmukh*, while earth-awareness is necessary, the driving force is his universal consciousness.

The radical and revolutionary changes the Gurus made, can be understood only on the assumption of their revelation and universal consciousness. No rational, mechanical, empirical or environmental logic can explain the originality of their thought, their mission and activities. An important fact to bear in mind is the die-hard burden of the prevalent, religiously sanctioned and divisive caste ideology. There was nothing in the contemporary life of Hinduism, Islam or Christianity to give rise to an ideology which instead of assuming a Fall from *satyug* to *kalyug*, or from the Garden of Eden to Earth, suggested an ideology of Evolution.

It is in this context that we feel that any theory of Syncretism or sociological, environmental, religious or empirical influences would appear to be superficial and naive. Sikh ideology or Sikh history has to be understood and interpreted on its own terms. It has been explained in the Guru Granth Sahib, and has been lived and demonstrated by the Gurus.

An argument is sometimes advanced that whereas the Torah, the Old Testament, and the Quran, along with enunciating spiritual principles and revelations, also prescribe civil duties, and rules concerning war, and rituals, the Guru Granth Sahib lays down no such specifications, and hence, it cannot be taken to be a scripture recommending any role in the socio-political life of man. The argument is invalid and even casual. Any detailed study of the Guru Granth Sahib would show the Gurus' wisdom and vision. For, while they clearly and repeatedly lay down every spiritual and moral principle, and man's responsibility concerning the religious, social and political life, they scrupulously avoid any injunction about civil, cultural or social matters, which, by their very nature, are always dated. We are all aware

that many of the civil rules or *Shariat*, provided in other scriptures or holy books, sometimes become a problem for the devotees. Because socio-political practices and matters, being always evolving and changing, rigid adherence to them in a future context could become an embarrassing and avoidable limitation. Hence, just as the Fifth Master, by authenticating the Scripture, excluded all possibility of confusion or controversy about the purity of the text and the principles prescribed, the Gurus have not included in the Scripture anything that could be dated. But it should not be understood that they have on that ground kept their followers without guidance. The Guru Granth Sahib not only lays down every spiritual principle, that is universal and eternal, but also all the major responsibilities, moral and social, which the seeker has to shoulder and discharge, i.e., regarding brotherhood of man and equality, fair distribution of wealth, sustenance of life, assistance to the down-trodden, and struggle against injustice and aggression. In addition, the more important lessons are the demonstrations and the lead which the Ten Masters have given over a period of about two and a half centuries in respect of almost every eventuality that could arise in the socio-political life of the individual and society. It is for setting examples of conduct for the religious man, regarding every aspect of life, that the Ten Gurus guided the Sikh society from its infancy to its maturity.

Conclusion: Thought, as stated by Iqbal, is the internal and integral component of the deed, which is its external part. In the case of mystics and prophets, unity between thought and deed is a logical certainty, because the two are not the product of ego-consciousness, but these are the expression of the fundamental or universal consciousness. There is no intervention of the ego-consciousness to distort the fundamental unity and harmony of life. Hence the deeds of the Gurus are the truest interpretation of their thesis and the *bani*. The Tenth Master has stressed that no success in understanding the Gurus' system, can be achieved, unless the unity of their spirit is accepted. He says, "Those who recognised them (all the Gurus) as one, were successful on the spiritual plain." This reveals the basis on which the Gurus themselves worked, and how firmly and strongly they believed in the unity of spirit, thesis and goal of all the Gurus. Therefore, what is of fundamental importance is the spirit, faith,

understanding and interpretation of Guru Nanak's thesis, emphasised by his successors, who were considered spiritually the most competent contemporaries who laid down their all for it.

In the matter of interpretation or hermeneutics, Sikhism has a unique advantage, which is not available to other religions. Here we have nine successors who have uniformly lived and interpreted the system of Guru Nanak. Three points indisputably emerge from the above. First, is the belief and understanding of the nine successors about his thesis. Second, they being the most competent contemporaries and executors of Guru Nanak's thesis, their understanding and interpretation of it is of far greater value and importance than *the post facto* views of those who have a subjective commitment to a dichotomous religion or a social science discipline or any other system, which at best is only limited in its vision and scope. Third, the Gurus have lived, acted and proclaimed the unity of that thesis. Consequently, the logical method of interpretation is to accept the unity of their spiritual experience, deliberation and deed, and to approach the understanding of their spiritual thesis from the end of the deed. We have no ground to think otherwise.

There is a major difference between the Sikh Scripture and other scriptures, which were constructed by human beings, decades even centuries, after the concerned prophet had left the scene. Of the Christian Gospel, John Hick states, "Our modern historical awareness is that Christian doctrines should not be regarded divinely formulated and guaranteed propositions, but rather as human attempts to grasp the religious meaning, primarily of the Christ event, and in the light of this of our human situation as a whole. The history of Christian theology is thus a part of the history of human thought." In the case of Sikhism, it is entirely different. The Guru Granth Sahib is not only the authentic *bani* of, or revelation to Guru Nanak, but it is also the authentic record of the understanding and interpretation of his five spiritual successors. They are not human records of understanding, but true statements of unsurpassed spiritual value and authenticity.

By their living and deeds the Gurus themselves have explained how to understand and interpret their *bani* or system. Guru Nanak laid down that the goal of man is to carry out His Will. The hymns

quoted above say that those who know His Will, carry it out, this being a spiritual compulsion, and that only when one walks in His Will, the Truth comes to be known about what is true living. These wonderful statements give us a true glimpse of Sikhism and Sikh hermeneutics. This emphasises the primary importance of the lives and deeds of the Gurus. Consequently, in Sikhism, the unity of the spiritual experience of the Gurus, their deliberations or thinking, and their deeds, has to be accepted in order to grasp or interpret their *bani* or thesis. This is what they have stressed in their hymns, quoted earlier.

The best, and the only way truly to interpret the thought of the Gurus, is to understand and trace it from their deeds to the other end of their spiritual experience. For, the Gurus emphasise that His Will has compulsively to be followed, and only after following it, one comes to know of the Truth. Accordingly, so as to interpret their system, their deeds have to be understood and given priority. Otherwise, any attempt to understand their thought by ignoring their deeds, will only keep us entangled in debates about what is correct linguistic paraphrase of *their Bani*. This is like putting the cart before the horse. It is this egoistic failing of the scholars that often results in numerous interpretations of the same writings. For example, the Vedas and Upanishads have been interpreted differently by scholars like Kumarila Bhatt, Sankara, Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhava, Vallabha, Swami Dayanand, and others. Many a time a scholar's interpretation is just a piece of self justification, as has happened in the interpretations of the variant Parnalis of Udasis, Nirmalas, Gyanis and others. For the Gurus, there was not only complete unity of spiritual experience and thought, but they were all pursuing uniformly the same thesis, aims, objectives and goals during the 240 years of their lives. Hence all talk of multiple or different levels or methods of approach and interpretations, is faulty *ab initio*. The Gurus themselves emphasise that the sure method of understanding and interpretation of their thesis, is, to start with deeds as the basis, which would give one a clue or glimpse of their spiritual experience. Otherwise, we shall have the same crop of confusion as that of this Parnali or that Parnali, Western Parnali or Eastern Parnali; and most of these would be products of egoistic self-justification, or personal prejudices.

For the true interpretation of the Sikh Gospel, there are five unique events which cannot be ignored. The first is that Guru Nanak's system is a revelation. Second, that the revelation has been recorded by the Guru or the prophet himself. Third, that both the Guru Granth Sahib and the Gurus emphasise the, impeccable unity of their thesis, and that failure to understand its unity and integrity means failure to comprehend and interpret its depths and truths. Fourth, that the thesis has been lived and demonstrated with love and humility by the Ten Masters for 240 years, thereby leaving no scope for ambiguity. These demonstrations have been made by them as the unquestioned heads of a society dealing with all kinds of problems, and under variant social and political circumstances. Fifth, as is the clear lesson from the Gurus' lives, the *kakka of kirpan* prescribed by the Tenth Master, stresses not only that Sikhism is a whole-life or *Miri-Piri* system, and that Sikhs should live truthfully, discharging all their social responsibilities in all fields of life, but also that they should never withdraw into the isolation of asceticism or monasticism.

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